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SUBJECT: HEADING INTO 2009, NCP LOOKS STRONG IN NORTH KORDOFAN

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Once an Umma Party stronghold, the National Congress Party (NCP) now appears well placed in North Kordofan heading into the 2009 national elections. On February 21, the NCP won University of North Kordofan student elections in a campaign supported by a visit of Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Al-Nafie and his promise to complete large infrastructure projects in the region. Both NCP and opposition leaders told econoff in a recent trip to the region that the NCP has the best organized campaign in North Kordofan. Opposition leaders also expressed unanimous concern that without election monitors 2009 elections will not be free and fair. END SUMMARY.

STUDENT ELECTIONS FORESHADOW 2009 ELECTION?

¶2. (U) On February 21, the University of North Kordofan held student elections, announcing the following day that the NCP had won. On March 3, the independent daily "As-Sahafa" reported that University of Kordofan Vice Chancellor Ahmad Al-Tajani Al-Mardi assured that the elections were free and fair and were monitored by impartial observers from all sectors of society.

¶3. (U) The NCP-appointed local commissioner of Nahud, Sharif Al-Fadil, told econoff on February 22 that the NCP won by over one thousand votes at North Kordofan University. According to Al-Fadil, this was the first NCP victory at this university in ten years, the SPLM having won the previous three years and other opposition movements before that. (Note: "Al-Soudani" reported that the NCP had not won in Kordofan elections in five years. End Note.) "This is a clear sign that the NCP is doing great work in North Kordofan," boasted Al-Fadil. He asserted that the NCP has succeeded in bringing new freedom to Sudan, ending the civil war, developing Sudan's petroleum industry, and improving Sudan's higher education. He boasted that it is the only party with intelligent leaders, and that the NCP was so intelligent that it has started to develop a lobby in the U.S. to undermine the Save Darfur coalition and other activist groups.

¶4. (U) Abd Al-Gadir Moniem Mansour, the Nazir (tribal leader) of the Hamar tribe told econoff on February 22 that the Kordofan student elections forecast how Kordofan will vote in 2009. According to Mansour, the NCP and SPLM are the only viable political parties in the region. The once popular Umma Party, he said, has imploded and now lacks money and influence. Mansour predicted that the NCP will win the 2009 elections.

¶5. (SBU) Dr. Abdel Daiem Abdel Salaam of the Information Media Department at the University of West Kordofan criticized the NCP's involvement in the student elections, stating that it heavily funded the campaign and used national institutions (specifically the National Support Fund for Students (NSFS)) only for the NCP's benefit. According to Abdel Salaam, the NSFS awards financial aid

(e.g., paying student fees, providing housing, and allocating per diems) to NCP-affiliated university students. Abdel Salaam stated that the NSFS is similar to other national institutions such as the Popular Defense Forces and the Popular Committees, which are manipulated by the NCP for partisan gain.

CAMPAIGNING FOR 2009

¶16. (U) Both NCP and opposition representatives stated that the NCP has the most extensive organization of any political party in North Kordofan. An-Nahud's NCP party president, Ibrahim Abdel Gadier, stated "The NCP is the only party that is organized and ready to represent the people." Abdel Gadier said that he traveled with Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir (a leading NCP member and Speaker of the National Assembly) and Nafie Ali Nafie (Assistant to the President, Deputy of the NCP, and NCP Secretary for Political Mobilization and Organization) when they visited the state recently. Nafie promised that by April, the remaining 17 kilometers of the El-Obeid-Nahud road would be paved. He also promised to pave 22 kilometers of internal roads in An-Nahud. Asked about the proximity of these projects to mid-term elections, Commissioner Sharif Al-Fadil told econoff, "Some might say that we are trying to buy the elections. But you have to ask who is buying and who is selling? The Sudanese people are very intelligent, and it is an insult to them for you to think that the Sudanese people will change their votes based on one or two projects."

¶17. (SBU) Opposition leaders concede that the NCP has a campaign advantage with money, a developed organization, and the power of the media. Abd Al-Hamid Moneim Mansour, the Minister of Health and SPLM president for North Kordofan state, complained that the NCP controls Sudanese state media, using it to its advantage, while leaving opposition parties "essentially without a voice." Dr. Abdel Daïem Abdel Salaam of the Information Media Department in West Kordofan University predicted that the NCP will win elections because it controls all influential leaders in the state, donates money to influential organizations and civic groups, and has a strong campaign structure. Abdel Salaam stated that the NCP has started campaign activities much earlier than any other party, that it has exerted "door to door pressure" on individuals in the community, and that not everything the NCP does is entirely transparent. The Nazir of the Hamar tribe based in An-Nahood claimed that the NCP recently gave substantial donations to the An-Nahood Women's Union and school uniforms to primary and secondary students. "This will influence the way these women and parents will vote," stated the tribal leader.

ELECTION MONITORS NEEDED

¶18. (U) In a large meeting with over twenty El-Obeid civic leaders of differing political orientations, econoff repeatedly heard of the need for independent observers of the 2009 elections. Al-Rashid Othman Al-Sayyed Abd Al-Baqi, the General Secretary for the Sudanese Businessmen's Association in El-Obeid stated, "We need unbiased and neutral observers. We will not trust the results of the elections if the government that is in power is responsible for organizing them." One representative from the El-Obeid Association for Reconstruction and Development argued that all parties need equal access to campaign funding, as "the NCP can buy the elections if it wants to right now." Other contacts stated that reliable census information is needed for Kordofan as the population of the region has risen dramatically in the last decade (with IDPs from Darfur and urban migration following desertification.) They argued that without the census information, conditions could be ripe for fraud.

COMMENT

¶19. (SBU) The NCP's success in the North Kordofan student elections follows other NCP university victories, such as in Kassala where a union of Islamic parties led primarily by the NCP defeated an opposition alliance of the Beja Congress, the Umma Party, the SPLM, and the Democratic Front on February 20. Nafie's tour of Kordofan, his pledged infrastructure projects, and his provocative speeches appear to have set the tone for campaigning elsewhere. For example, one week after his trip to Kordofan, Nafie traveled to White Nile State where he inaugurated a number of infrastructure projects (e.g. an electricity station, new roads and an irrigation canal),

witnessed a mass marriage ceremony of 500 couples, and provocatively declared, "We will defeat the charlatan of this era and win elections."

¶10. (SBU) Comment continued: In North Kordofan, the opposition already is accusing the NCP of controlling state media, using national resources and institutions for partisan purposes, and even buying votes. The opposition parties' concern about the potential for fraud and abuse in the 2009 elections is justified, and the international community will need to focus more attention on the elections as they grow closer. There are numerous obstacles to timely elections (the elections law still has not been passed due to wrangling over percentages) but it is clear that the NCP is preparing aggressively for them.

FERNANDEZ